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**U.S. Attorney General
Dick Thornburgh**



Major Art Theft
See Inside Back Cover

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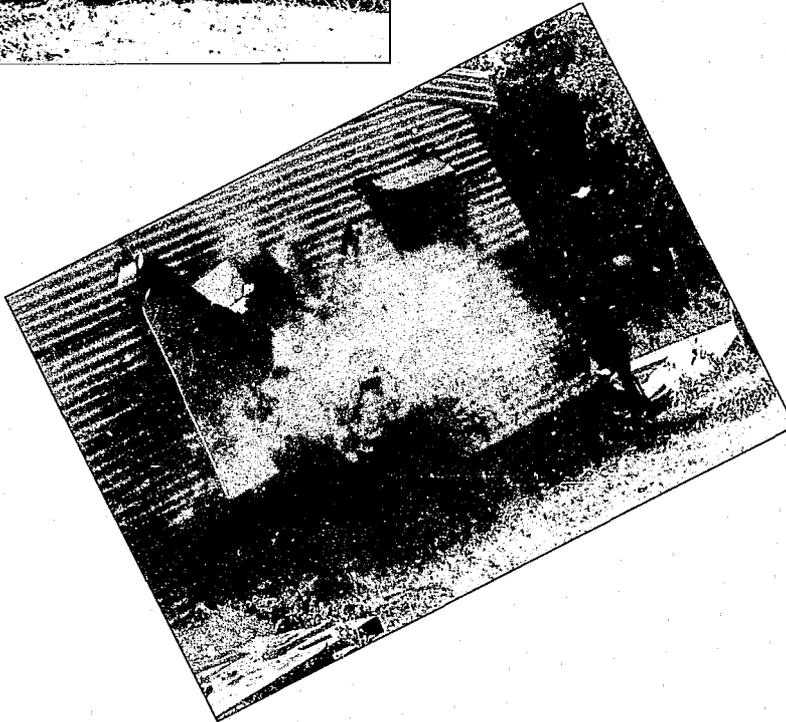
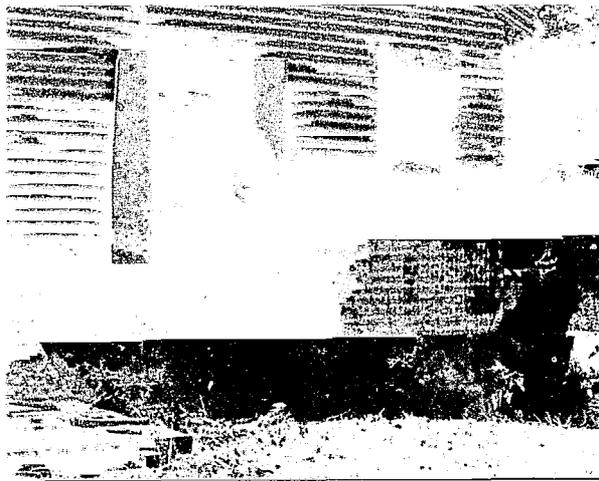
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The Cover: The Honorable Dick Thornburgh is the 76th Attorney General of the United States (See page 1). Claude Monet's *Impression: Sunrise* has been stolen (See inside back cover).

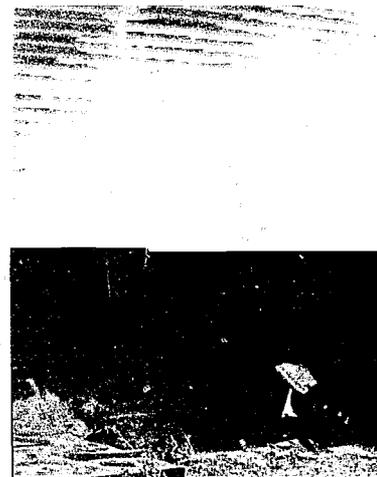
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Assignment and Coordination of Tactical Units



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Over the past several decades, concern has been expressed about police capabilities for responding to violent criminal activity and terrorism. The national increase in violent crime and expanded terrorist incidents internationally have caused citizens and police professionals to question the state of readiness in some police departments. While some analysts have criticized the development of tactical units at the local level due to cost, limited number of assignments, and/or amount of specialization required, others argue that these units are essential for providing a municipal readiness to respond to local crises and violent conflicts.

Leonard and More, in *Police Organization and Management*, for instance, argue that "even in the most efficiently organized and managed police departments, occasions constantly arise requiring special operational planning and execution."¹ Although somewhat rare in small cities, these types of situations are quite numerous in large urban centers. Similarly, in an article published in the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Boyd noted:

"Justification for [tactical] teams is found in the daily

encounters that occur in this country between law enforcement personnel and suspects fleeing from crime, mentally disturbed individuals, and those involved in domestic and neighborhood disputes. 'Routine' incidents such as these account for far more gun battles and police officer injuries and deaths than the more newsworthy conflicts between police and militant or terrorist groups."²

Given these views regarding the use and justification of tactical units and a variety of questions about the organization and assignment of tactical units in Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies, the Criminal Justice Research and Training Center sought to survey police agencies to determine the current level of tactical unit development and the types of assignments routinely handled by these units. This survey, completed in 1987, provides a range of useful information about police tactical units and their operations.

Survey and Respondent Profile

The survey included a 10-page questionnaire covering a



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variety of subjects related to tactical unit development and operation, which was mailed to tactical unit commanders in all U.S. cities with a population of at least 50,000. A total of 456 questionnaires was sent to this sample and 186 valid responses were received, representing a 41-percent rate of return.

In the survey instrument, the term "tactical unit" was defined to mean "a formal police unit organized to respond to hostage taking, barricading, riots, bombings, or other terroristic incidents." Since the 1960's, when these units began appearing in police agencies, a variety of names have been used to differentiate their function from that of the uniformed division, patrol units, or other police components. Table 1 represents the results of a survey question asking respondents to state what the departmental unit is called. These data suggest that the terms "tactical unit" or "SWAT"

unit are the more popular names in this survey population.

The population of municipalities responding to the survey included 46 percent in the range of 50,000 to 99,999, 34 percent from 100,000 to 249,999, and 17 percent in the population category over 250,000. Officer strength in responding cities likewise varied, with 17 percent of responding departments having less than 100 officers, 41 percent in the range of 100 to 199 officers, and 40 percent having 200 or more officers.

Survey results reflected various locational placement of tactical units within departments, suggesting that some operate close to the top of the organizational hierarchy while others are lower in the command structure. In most small departments (those with less than 100 officers), the tactical unit commander was listed as reporting directly to the chief of police; in larger departments, tactical unit commanders report through intermediate management levels.

Table 1

FORMAL TITLE OF TACTICAL UNIT

Tactical Unit	22%
SWAT	20
Emergency Response Unit	15
Special Operations	7
Other title	28
No such unit	9

Tactical Unit Assignments

Table 2 indicates the suggested list of possible assignments for tactical units. A variety of daily police duties and activities were included in the survey instrument to assess the degree to which these emergency response units are used in routine police operations. For instance, traffic accident investigation, homicide investigation, general surveillance, and routine call handling were checked at a low rate by respondents. Generally, tactical units are not used to handle "routine calls" for service, but are dispatched to unusual or special situations.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that "routine patrol activities" was listed by 36 percent of respondents as an activity in which tactical units are "often used" or "sometimes used," possibly indicating the multiple assignment of tactical unit personnel in small departments. For instance, in some agencies, the tactical unit is used as an extra patrol component, or members of regular patrol units may have secondary assignments as officers on the tactical unit.

As indicated in these statistics, the most frequently noted types of activities in which tactical units are "often used" include hostage situations, dignitary and public official protection, violent demonstrations, and situations involving some terroristic threat. Controlling special events, dealing with specific threats against police officers, and handling demonstrations and public rallies were found to be frequent assignments when the "sometimes used" and "often used" categories are combined.

A number of departments indicated a variety of possible assignments in response to the "other" category. These uses included high-risk warrant service calls, drugs raids, crimes involving use of firearms, felony arrests, mass arrests, and training of officers in special programs. Support for the direct involvement in drug raids was listed quite often as a special assignment in the

"other" category. This function has become an important assignment for special development units and will undoubtedly expand given the current national drug crisis. Many departments have instituted special, full-time drug squads which are similar or identical to tactical units in selection of officers, training, deployment approaches, and other organizational characteristics.

Table 2

ASSIGNMENT OF TACTICAL UNITS

	Often used	Sometimes used	Never used
Homicide report investigation	1%	10%	80%
Major traffic accidents	2	7	83
Multiple homicide report investigation	2	11	78
Investigation of routine criminal cases	3	11	77
Surveillance for general intelligence	5	19	66
Robbery-in-progress calls	5	34	52
Bomb threats	8	23	60
Surveillance of routine criminal activity	9	24	58
Patrolling of labor union/picket lines	9	29	53
Patrolling of public rallies	9	32	50
Peaceful demonstrations	10	40	41
Threats against police officers	11	38	39
Emergencies caused by extreme weather	12	22	58
Handling natural disaster problems	12	23	55
Actual bombing incidents	13	23	54
Directed patrol of high-crime areas	15	24	52
Controlling special events	16	41	34
Threats against public officials	18	47	24
Surveillance of suspected terrorists	19	27	42
Routine patrol activities	26	10	55
Counterterrorist target assessment	39	25	25
Demonstrations accompanied by violence	41	33	17
Dignitary protection	44	36	9
Barricading without hostages	74	16	2
Hostage situations	78	12	2
Other	9	6	2

Information Collection and Assessment

The methods used by tactical units to gather information for planning and operations are presented in table 3. Most all methods presented as alternatives in the survey were selected as being used at high rates except "infiltration of police officers into extremist groups." All other methods were either "sometimes used" or "often used" by over one-half of the responding departments. The use of paid informants was, however, listed as "never used" by a very high proportion of departments.

The "other" information collection category included in the questionnaire revealed answers ranging from use of formal departmental units, such as the crime analysis and research and planning units, to victims, friends, and

neighbors of persons under surveillance as sources of information. One department listed "aerial and ground scouting" as a technique sometimes used.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Since many violent criminal events, and probably all political

"...occasions constantly arise requiring special operational planning and execution."

terrorist activities, are multi-jurisdictional in scope, it is important that tactical units have pre-arranged communication links and strong support from neighboring tactical units and/or police agencies with other levels of govern-

ment.³ Good police planning would dictate that support arrangements be made before an event takes place and that coordination and information sharing be ongoing as an incident unfolds. Table 4 provides some indication of the means reported by tactical units to maintain contact with other local police units, relevant State organizations, and Federal agencies.

From these data, it appears that the more informal approach of telephone calls and specially scheduled meetings represent the primary means used by tactical units to maintain contact with appropriate units in other departments. While all communication methods were checked by some departments, the use of "regularly scheduled liaison meetings" and "computer network exchange" were identified by a lower percentage of departments.

Table 3

METHODS USED IN INFORMATION-GATHERING ACTIVITIES

	Often used	Sometimes used	Never used
Internal contacts with patrol officers and detectives	57%	31%	7%
Exchange of intelligence information with other local law enforcement agencies.....	46	44	4
Internal departmental records and computerized files	41	39	13
Computerized information from other law enforcement agencies	34	51	9
Surveillance activities	31	50	11
Reports from Federal and State police organizations.....	26	61	5
Computerized information from other governmental and private organizations.....	24	51	18
Use of unpaid informants.....	18	50	25
Use of paid informants	11	41	40
Infiltration of police officers into extremist groups	1	16	76

Table 4

TACTICAL UNIT COORDINATION WITH OTHER LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

	Local Police	State Police	Federal Agencies
Telephone calls on an as-needed basis	83%	69%	67%
Special meetings on an as-needed basis	77	57	58
Exchange of intelligence information bulletins	63	46	38
Computer network information exchange	50	43	30
Regularly scheduled liaison meetings	33	13	9
Other	13	11	10

A second general conclusion that can be drawn from table 4 is that local tactical teams engage in more extensive coordination with other local police units than with State and Federal agencies. The figures suggest that local police maintain contact most often with other local police units, as opposed to State or Federal agencies. This may result primarily from the types of problems faced by local tactical units. Interestingly, the departmental percentages for contact with State and Federal agencies are almost identical for all times. This might suggest more concern with locally oriented violent criminal activities as opposed to international matters, which would of necessity involve Federal and possibly State agencies.

The variety of "other" means for coordination listed by respondents included joint or inter-agency training sessions, joint exercises and seminars, yearly training sessions, State association meetings, involvement of personnel from other departments, multi-

county hostage committees, regional SWAT associations, and mutual aid and mutual assistance agreements. A number of these activities were identified by several departments.

Barriers to Internal Coordination and Cooperation

While coordination with other units of government is important, internal coordination of the tactical

To determine those measures currently used by tactical unit commanders to maintain strong internal support, a general question regarding barriers to good coordination and cooperation was included in the survey.

One major barrier cited by numerous team commanders was the issue of control at an incident scene. To illustrate, the following comments were provided by re-

"... it is important that tactical units have pre-arranged communication links and strong support from neighboring tactical units...."

team with other units and divisions within the department, and solicitation of cooperation from such units, is vital to the success of an operation when disaster strikes. Effective cooperation can rarely be dictated; therefore, team commanders must constantly use their personal skills informally to promote the joint interests of the department and the tactical unit.

spondents commenting on this problem:

"One thing needed is a basic education of personnel as to what the team is and that it is available to assist other units rather than take over from them. Other units and officers are sometimes of the opinion that a tactical unit is out to make all the major arrests and

is therefore a threat to their own capabilities.”

“Other department supervisors are unaware of the capabilities of our tact unit and are unwilling to give up their authority.”

A lack of understanding was noted by numerous departments as a primary problem in tactical unit development and use. Survey respondents noted in this regard:

“Lack of knowledge on the part of other commanders and officers on the mission of the tactical operations unit poses problems.”

“Failure of other units to understand our mission. We do not want their arrests — only to help them and conduct our business so that district officers do not get needlessly injured.”

Poor communication was listed by several departments as a barrier to effective operation, with one department noting that “a lack of communication between upper level supervisors in coordinating tactical unit activities with other departmental activities” is a major

“One major barrier cited ... was the issue of control at an incident scene.”

problem. Another noted that “good communication among different units and a good understanding of all concerned in the need for the special unit” is required.

Jealousy on the part of patrol officers and other supervisors was mentioned quite frequently as a source of friction between patrol units and tactical unit personnel. Respondents provided the following comments in this regard:

“Jealousy and envy on the part of non-tactical members. Tactical members not sharing their training and knowledge with non-tactical members and attitude of being better than non-tactical members.”

“Jealousy brought on by the perception by others that tactical is an elite unit and handles only the “good” or “fun” calls. In reality, tactical work is at different times boring, hard work, very hazardous, and frustrating.”

Coordination and Cooperation Barriers

- Issue of control at an incident scene
- Lack of understanding in tactical unit development and use
- Poor communication
- Jealousy of patrol officers and other supervisors
- Poor attitude of supervisors
- Lack of a comprehensive departmental policy addressing tactical unit management and operation

